

AN
ADDRESS

DELIVERED AT

THE COMMENCEMENT

OF THE

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

OF THE

PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH

IN THE

UNITED STATES,

HELD IN

CHRIST CHURCH, NEW-YORK,

ON THE

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BY JOHN CROES, D. D.

BISHOP OF THE PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH IN NEW-JERSEY.



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A D D R E S S.



Gentlemen, the Professors of this Institution,

IRISE at your request, to deliver the address which custom has authorized on these occasions: and while I gratefully feel the respect which you have shown me, I cannot withhold that which is so justly your due, for the ability, the zeal, and the faithfulness, with which you have respectively executed your important offices; manifested, as they have been, not only in the recent, but in every preceding annual examination of the students of the Seminary committed to your care. Were I to give vent to the full tide of my feelings on the present occasion, I should express myself, Gentlemen, in much stronger terms of approbation and regard than I have permitted myself to do. Less than what I have said, would virtually have been a denial of the commendation which you justly merit.

In addressing you generally, young Gentlemen, students of the Seminary, and especially those of you who have this day completed your triennial course of study, and are on the eve of receiving its honours, it will be expected perhaps, that I shall also say something in approbation of your diligence, and proficiency in the studies

which you have pursued ; if such diligence and proficiency have been apparent in your examinations.

Although this has been indirectly expressed, in the short, but just tribute of respect which has been paid to your able and learned instructors ; yet I hope it will not be thought improper, should I address to you personally a few words commendatory of your theological attainments. On this, as well as on former occasions, I believe there has been but one sentiment among the Trustees, and other gentlemen, who attended your examinations. Whether your attention had been directed to the improvement of your knowledge in the Greek, or to the acquisition of the Hebrew language ; whether to a general acquaintance with the several books of which the Holy Scriptures are composed, or to a critical investigation of the original text of each ; whether systematic Theology or Ecclesiastical History ; whether the nature and constitution of the Christian Church, the origin, orders, and duties of its ministry, or pulpit eloquence, had been the subject of your studies, you have generally, in the opinion of all, exhibited, by your attainments, both the skill and precision with which you have been taught, and the diligence and care with which you have studied.

But though you have made such considerable progress in theological science, and the studies connected with it ; and—in the case of those who have completed the course prescribed by the canons of the Church—are ready for admission into the first grade of the ministry ; yet, in the proper exercise of your office, more, much more is implied, than the bare communication of the knowledge which you have so largely acquired : “ For” though “ the priest’s lips should keep knowledge,” and the people “ should seek the law at his mouth, for he is the “ messenger of the Lord of hosts ;” yet if he do not also, by the piety, purity, and inoffensiveness of his life

and conversation, show that the doctrines and precepts which he teaches and inculcates upon his hearers, have their due influence upon his own mind and heart; he will make but little useful impression upon them; and of course his preaching be comparatively in vain.

The manner also of communicating the knowledge which you have so sedulously acquired, and of using the primitive and incomparable ritual which the Church has provided and exclusively adopted, are important parts in the execution of the sacred and responsible office which is shortly to be committed to you; and have no small claim to your most serious consideration and care.

These, and other properties necessary to be known and observed in the exercise of the ministerial office, have all doubtless been presented to your minds by the able Professors of the Institution; and have made, we trust, impressions not easily effaced. Still, such is the frailty and weakness of our nature—so liable are we, in the continual conflict between the flesh and the spirit, to lose sight, in a degree, of the motives which alone should actuate us, and suffer others of a contrary nature insidiously to obtain the ascendancy in our minds—that we cannot be too often reminded of the spiritual nature and properties of our office; and at the same time be cautioned against self-delusion, and the delusions of the tempter. Upon any other principle than this imperfection in our nature, addresses on these occasions—as they are little more than repetitions of what you have already heard—would seem entirely superfluous.

In reviewing, young Gentlemen, the administration of the office to which you purpose shortly to be admitted, it occurred to me, that something might perhaps be seasonably and usefully said, in the first place, to remind you of the spirit and the manner in which the Gospel ought to be preached; and to caution you against the

admission and indulgence of views and feelings altogether at variance with the one or the other; which too frequently, it is to be feared, though perhaps imperceptibly, influence young men on their entrance upon the exercises of the desk and pulpit.

In the second place, to guard you against the impropriety, not to say criminality, of departing from the rubrics of our ritual, and from our seemly and long established usages, and the evils of which such departure is the fruitful cause.

From the first exercise of his ministry, it is especially the duty, and ought to be the care of every person admitted to holy orders, to bear in mind, and impress deeply upon his heart, that he is not, as in other professions, and in mere secular pursuits, acting for himself, pursuing his own interest and glory, and therefore at liberty to use such means as he may think will best conduce to the accomplishment of those objects; but that he is, as his title imports, a servant, or special agent of his Lord and Master Jesus Christ, in whose service he has voluntarily engaged; and is employed by him as a steward, to dispense to his fellow-men the mysteries of God, or the great doctrines and precepts of the Gospel. In all his ministerial performances, therefore, whether public or private; whether conducting the worship of God, administering his holy sacraments, or delivering his message of peace and reconciliation to the penitent and believing; the obligation rests upon him to act strictly and faithfully in this character. Contemplating himself in this point of view, can he for a moment indulge the thought, that he may consistently, and with impunity, make the Church of the living God his theatre, to display the elegance and taste of his composition, the greatness of his literary and scientific attainments, and the graces of his elocution; and thus excite the admiration,

and court the applause of his hearers? These qualities, though lawfully, and sometimes not improperly, exhibited in other places, and on secular occasions, are very foreign from the Church of God; and the exhibition of them, for such purposes, is inconsistent with the character of his ministering servants.

Different from this is the christian preacher, who acts under the influence of his sacred and responsible station. He preaches not himself, delivers not his own philosophical or metaphysical speculations, nor does he seek admiration by the display of his oratory. On the contrary, he acts always as the steward and servant of his Master; and therefore cannot, consistently with his office, deliver any thing to his hearers but the message committed to him—the everlasting Gospel: and though he dispenses it with the solemnity, the earnestness, and the dignity which become a message from heaven, he dares not mingle with it “the enticing words of man’s wisdom;” nor so far forget himself and his high station, as to aim at the praise and adulation of his hearers, when he ought only to seek the glory of God and the salvation of his fellow-men.

It may be thought that the description just given of the manner in which a truly Christian minister dispenses the word of God, is so obviously correct, so necessarily the course that every one who enters upon the sacred office is bound to pursue, that cases of an opposite character can rarely occur—at least not sufficient to justify a formal caution on the subject. This conclusion would be natural and just, if the motives that influence the human mind were always pure; if even men who profess to be religious, and believe that they are under the influence of that profession, were not also, in a considerable degree, under the influence of the corruption of our common nature; and are therefore not only liable to mistake, but

frequently do mistake the motives that govern their conduct. Since, indeed, we meet with instances of such departure from the simplicity, modesty, and unaffected manner with which the prayers of our Church should be offered, and the Gospel preached,—instances in which the voice and manner of the officiator, the style of his composition, and the display of his learning when he preaches, give us too much reason to fear that he is more solicitous to be considered an orator and a scholar, than he is to impress upon the minds and hearts of his audience the doctrines and duties of our holy religion,—we must believe that the caution is neither unseasonable, nor altogether unnecessary.

I would not have it, however, understood, from what has been said, that I do not approve of the exercise of much care and attention as to the manner of performing the devotional services of our Church, and of dispensing the mysteries of God. Far from this: especial attention, I think, should be given to the subject, in order that these important offices may be performed with the utmost propriety. As congregations are generally composed of the learned as well as the unlearned, of the refined as well as the plain and uncultivated—candidates for orders, as well as those who already conduct the devotions of the people, and dispense to them the word of God, should take great pains that the manner of their performances may be, not only, not offensive, but pleasing and agreeable to all. For this purpose, they should endeavour to be natural, easy, and upright in their positions, free from awkward and unseemly motions and gestures, and all grimaces or distortions of the countenance. That they may also be heard with ease and satisfaction, their enunciation should be natural, in contradistinction to swelling, mouthing, or vociferating—articulate and clear, not rapid, mumbling, affectedly precise, nor with mea-

sured tones ; and their pronounciation should be carefully correct, according to the best standards ; in fine, they should endeavour so to modulate their voices, as to convey the meaning of every sentence they deliver, without dulness, monotony, feebleness, or so defective a cadence as either to cause their hearers the trouble of supplying from their own conceptions the last word, which is pronounced inaudibly by many speakers, or to discontinue their attention to the discourse altogether.

Their general manner also should be solemn, devout, earnest, and impressive ; such as becomes the sacred office of those who are set apart and divinely commissioned to offer up the supplications of sinful men to the Majesty of heaven, and declare his message of peace and reconciliation ; and such as leaves no doubt of their sincerity in the minds of their congregations—no idea that they are thinking of themselves, or “ handling the word “ of GOD deceitfully ; but by manifestation of the truth, “ are commending themselves to every man’s conscience “ in the sight of GOD.”

This, it will be observed, is very different from that theatrical manner, that aiming at the character of an orator, with a view to popular applause, which some clergymen, not heeding the nature of their office, and “ loving “ the praise of men more than the praise of GOD,” have in every age of the Christian Church too plainly manifested.

I shall now, in a few remarks, call your attention to the impropriety, not to use a harsher term, of not regarding the rubrics of our ritual, and our seemly and long established usages ; and the evils of which such disregard is the fruitful cause.

The duty and utility of strictly observing the canon and rubrics in the divine service of our Church is so

obvious, that any caution against disregarding or violating them would seem totally unnecessary. But, obvious as the duty and utility are, it cannot be denied or concealed, that clergymen are found among us, who, from whatever cause, or under whatever pretence, do, in some cases, neither regard the letter nor evident meaning of the rubrics; but either omit or abridge some part of the appointed service, or add to it some service or ceremony of their own. Now the rubrics, that direct the performance of those parts of the service which they omit at their pleasure, not only do not allow, either by their letter, by fair construction, or by inference, the omission of them; but indeed give no countenance to it. Much less does the thirty-fourth canon, which confines the public worship of the Church to the Book of Common Prayer, authorize, or even countenance the introduction or use of any extemporaneous or other prayer, during divine service, whether before or after sermon: and yet on this canon, the clergymen referred to, found their presumed permission to use such prayer. A very little reflection, however, must convince every person, who is not under the influence of invincible prejudice, that the Church could not, by any supposed omission in the thirty-fourth canon, have intended to give permission to her clergymen to use even extempore prayer in any part of her public service, or to countenance such an idea. She could not have been so inconsistent with herself. Why did the Church from which she immediately sprung, in the establishment of her public worship, adopt the liturgic mode? Because the Church of God, both Jewish and Christian, had always worshipped with forms of prayer; because her Divine Head had sanctioned that mode, by composing a form for his disciples; and because, on these accounts, as well as the obvious advantages, indeed necessity, of it, in a joint worship, she could not avoid the conviction that

it was unquestionably the best, and therefore the only one she ought to adopt. Could we then, originating from that Church, identified with her for many years, believing, with her, that the liturgic mode of worship is the preferable one—have been so inconsistent as to adopt in lieu of it, or even permit to be used in any part of the service, a mode of prayer, which, upon our own principles and uniform practice, must have been considered inferior, and not at all suited for public worship? Surely the Convention which passed that canon, could have had no idea that they were permitting a mode of prayer to be used in one part of the divine service, which they actually prohibited in another: for the same reason which made it improper in the one case, made it equally improper in the other.

But that the permission contended for cannot be inferred from the presumed omission in the thirty-fourth canon, and that the Convention who enacted it had no intention of giving such permission, will be strikingly evident from the tenor of the thirty-eighth canon, which was passed in the Convention of 1795, six years after the thirty-fourth was enacted. In this canon, authority was given to the Bishops to compose forms of prayer and thanksgiving, to be used in their respective Dioceses on extraordinary public occasions. The necessary inference from this is, that the Bishops themselves, previously to the existence of this canon, had no authority even to compose forms of prayer on any occasion of public worship, much less to make those of an extemporaneous kind. How then can it be supposed, that the Presbyters and Deacons possessed authority, by the thirty-fourth canon, to make extemporaneous prayers on ordinary occasions, provided it was done after sermon, when it was thought necessary to enact a new canon, in order to give authority

to the Bishops even to compose *forms of prayer*, and then only on extraordinary occasions?

But had the clergymen who persevere in misconstruing the thirty-fourth canon and some of the rubrics, and in acting upon that misconstruction, much better ground to justify their departure from uniformity than they have; was the sense of the canon and rubrics, indeed, at all questionable; still it might be thought that love of order, the unity of the Church, and respect for the opinions of the Bishops and a large majority of their brethren, would induce them to conform—at least till they should bring the question before the General Convention, and a final decision be had on it in that assembly. That they have not already taken this course, is greatly to be lamented; because every departure from uniformity in worship, which the Church has with so much care endeavoured to preserve, tends to weaken the union, disturb the peace, and finally produce dissensions and schisms in that body.

Should this course be objected to, on the ground that a majority, both of the House of Bishops and of Clerical and Lay Deputies, would most likely decide against their construction of the canon and rubrics; and, in all probability, would not consent so to alter them as to meet their wishes—What would this be, but saying, in other words, that they are not willing to submit a questionable construction of the laws and regulations of the Church to a decision of the General Convention, the highest legislative body within her pale, because the majority of that body may decide against their wishes; and they are not disposed to yield to the judgment of that majority, although it should comprehend in its number a large proportion of the elder and most respectable and experienced clergy.

men in the Church? This would certainly argue but little for their modesty, their charity, their meekness, their regard to the apostolic exhortations—"Be ye all of one mind"—"Let every thing be done decently, and in order"—"Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves;" or for their compliance with the subscription, and with the promise, which they made at their ordination.

Were the omitting of the parts of the service referred to, and the use of extempore prayer, in themselves cases of conscience—and was there no obligation resting on clergymen to comply with the canons and rubrics—the case would be different: but as the omitting of the former, and the using of the latter, (were there no laws requiring and prohibiting them,) could be considered only as mere matters of expediency; the putting at hazard of the peace and unity of the Church, and the creating of parties in her bosom, by pertinaciously contending for such things, and against the face of the rubrics and canon, cannot be justified by any principles of religion or prudence. But were they even cases of conscientious scruples, the course pursued of evading the plain sense of the canon and rubric, by a gross misconstruction, could on no just principle be defended.

In either case, if they could not conform to the laws, regulations, and usages of the Church, they would do her much less injury by withdrawing from her pale—however dangerous that procedure might be for themselves—than, by remaining in communion with her, and continuing to disregard her ordinances; for they thus disturb her peace, and will ultimately rend, or be the cause of rending her body.

But the interruption of the harmony of the Church, and the divisions likely to ensue from it, are not the only—

though they are the greatest—evils which arise from dissimilarity in our worship, produced by clergymen who vary from the canonical and rubrical mode. The evils however to which I allude are serious, and worthy of the attention of those clergymen who occasion them, although they do it unintentionally. They occur whenever such clergymen officiate in the churches of those who are uniform and regular. Their departure from the accustomed mode confuses the people, and disturbs their devotions; and their omission of parts of the service causes much dissatisfaction, and prevents the benefit which the people might otherwise receive from their ministrations. The same, or similar evils, happen to clergymen who are habituated to the authorized service and the established usages of the Church, whenever they are called upon to perform divine service in churches, the clergymen of which, not satisfied with the prescribed modes, have either changed them for such as are more seemly in their own imaginations, or have abolished some of them altogether. The consequence is, that the clergymen not accustomed to such changes and novelties, become embarrassed, have their devotional feelings interrupted or disturbed, appear awkward, and are sometimes unfitted to perform their duty in a proper manner. I speak of these evils, in some degree, from personal experience.

Surely no benefits can arise from clergymen's altering the established service to suit their own or other persons' notions of propriety or expediency, equal to these inconveniences, and, indeed, in some respects, positive evils.

What sober-minded conscientious minister, therefore, who attentively considers the subject, could think of departing from the forms and usages of the Church, in the smallest degree, without her entire concurrence and approbation; lest he should mar or interrupt that beautiful

uniformity, so conducive to the harmony, order, and unity of the body of Christ? Besides; a single deviation, however slight, might, from its pernicious example, become the prolific parent of a host of others. For, if any one clergyman, or set of clergymen, may assume the privilege of altering, amending, abridging, or increasing the services of the Church, whether by a misconstruction of the thirty-fourth canon and one of the rubrics, or by a direct violation of the promise he made and subscribed at his ordination; every other clergyman may, with equal propriety, assume the same privilege; and who could tell to what lengths the practice might extend, and what evils it might produce?

In making these observations, young Gentlemen, I do not intend that it should be inferred that I have any ground to doubt of the correct and uniform course which, under the Divine blessing, you will pursue in your ministrations. You have been too well instructed, and are under the influence of principles and feelings, I hope, which leave little room for fears on this subject. Yet in the waywardness of the human mind, and the temptations to error and sin to which it is exposed, as well from the wiles of men, as of Satan, the apostolic admonition is never unnecessary nor unseasonable: "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

Praying that you may be preserved from these and all other evils, in the discharge of the duties in which you are about to engage, we commend you to the grace of God, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

